Ministry of
Culture and
Recreation
Ontario

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RESOURCE CENTRE

A Path to the Community

A Recreationist's Guide to Community Research

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Preface

The material for this booklet was prepared by Bryan Tisdall for the Task Force on Shared Decision-Making, Sports and Recreation Bureau of the Ministry of Culture and Recreation. The immediate purpose was defined by the members of the Task Force on Shared Decision-Making in Ontario.

As the project developed, the Task Force saw the need for a basic handbook on research and survey methods for the use of recreationists in the municipal field. The material should also be useful to workers in provincial organizations, recreation students, instructors and program planners in many other sectors.

The booklet is not designed to present final answers. It is rather an eye-opener that will suggest the many ways in which program planners can go into their communities for information they need to create recreation programs tailored to the needs of the participants.

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Research

Research is a frightening word.

Why?

Because research produces data, and data has become the basis of today's society. So research is esteemed as a sacred calling, a deep cavern containing many dangers and deceptions.

Research has become a speciality, removed to the realm of the specialist, so we're all hesitant to enter this somewhat threatening realm for fear we shall trip and be lost forever.

And thus we say we don't need research, for we have all the data we need (which we don't). Or we say we don't need data, for the actions we should take are obvious (which they aren't). Or we say research can't help us anyway (which it can).

"So what other way out is there?" you ask.

Easy!

Let's relook research, see it simply as a way of getting information, for that is all it is. Research provides information on the questions we have to answer to do our jobs better. It tells us about our communities, and their citizens.

Research is just like me asking you what time it is. Research is as complicated as the task to which it is put. If we know what we want research to do, we can make it do it.

And that is what this book is all about: looking at recreation and research, and treating research as "a path to the community".

A Few Preliminaries

Before we begin, let's get a few things straight:

All those involved in recreation planning — the citizen, the committee member, and the professional— want their plans to be effective.

To be effective, plans must be based on accurate information.

Ongoing, day-to-day communication is the most reliable source of information. Surveys are a poor substitute, but often the best method available!

"Survey", as used in this booklet, refers to an effort to gather information directly from the residents in a community.

Surveys can be used as a path leading to better communication, or a crutch to lean on instead of improving communication.

To make this path an easier route to follow, work with the citizens of your community to:

— define the objectives
— decide on the questions
— gather the information
— examine the findings
— take the action.

Let's see if we can discover some guideposts down this path to the community.

Surveys, Surveys, Surveys

Before outlining the specific steps involved in conducting a survey, let's look at the different types of survey.

You must know what it is you are trying to do before you can do it!

Surveys differ according to:

- the area to be surveyed
  - an entire city or town
  - a section of a city
  - a community
  - a neighborhood
- the topic to be surveyed
  - all recreation
  - physical recreation/sports
  - specific social or cultural activities
  - outdoor recreation
  - facilities and/or parks and open spaces
- the people to be surveyed
  - the entire population
  - adults
  - children
  - senior citizens
  - mothers
  - youth
- the scope to be surveyed
  - public recreation only
  - private clubs and organizations
  - household recreation
  - entertainments
- the method to be used
  - mailed questionnaires
  - personal interviews
  - telephone interviews
  - group interview
  - mass meeting

These distinctions, and others mentioned later, are very important. They influence every question that will be asked. All these decisions must be made before the survey begins.

You will have to decide which method you want to use:

Personal interviews are the most expensive and time-consuming method, but yield the best information. Return rates are higher, but more personal avenues will be opened.

Personal interviews are particularly good when you can get the community involved in doing the interviewing.

Mailed questionnaires are much less expensive, but not nearly as effective in getting returns. They must be shorter and less involved than those above.

A stamped, self-addressed return envelope is essential for good returns. A small gift, e. g. a pencil with the local crest, will also increase returns.

An accompanying letter on official letterhead will bring better returns also.

Telephone interviews fall in the middle. They too must be short, but an interviewer can interpret the survey form to the respondent.

Telephone interviews are good to ask a few in-depth questions about a specific topic.

The telephone is a good tool to use with the other methods to encourage responses to mailed questionnaires, or to arrange appointments with hard-to-get personal interviewees.

Group interviews are ideal if you can get the people you wish to interview all together. This usually is best when it is clubs or organizations you wish to interview, and worst if you wish a cross-section of the entire community, because all groups are selective in one way or another.

Combinations of methods are also possible; for example, the drop-off and pick-up survey form, or the mailed questionnaire, with a phone-in number if difficulties arise. The methods aren't set; you can add any component that will help!

The choice is yours. Only you know the advantages and disadvantages that apply!

Follow the Bouncing Ball

It's time now to work through the mechanics of conducting a survey. Each of the steps is outlined below, along with a few pointers to help you on your way.

- Define your objective.

  Do not begin the survey until you can state in writing why you are doing it.

  You should also know what specific use will be made of it. This is for your own benefit and protection when it comes time for analysis and presentation.

- Determine the specific information desired.

  Ask yourself, "What must I know to fulfil my objective?"

- Check to see if this information is already available.

  Maybe someone else has already done a survey — the town clerk, or a service club president are often in the know about such things.

  The Canada Census, available at any library, has lots of good background information.

  Be thorough here. People don't like to be questioned again, if they have recently completed a questionnaire. Also why waste your own time?

- Decide how this information will be analysed and presented.

  Now is the time, before writing the questions, to develop a method for handling information — i.e. construct dummy tables, charts, etc. The form in which you want the final information determines how you should ask the questions!

- Construct the individual questions.

  Ask questions required to fulfil your objective.

Don't ask questions because others have asked them or because the information gathered by them would seem interesting.

Why? Partly because people turn off on long surveys, so it's not wise to ask unnecessary questions. Partly because your important questions get lost in the crowd. Examples are given later.

> Ask these questions of each item you compose:
>
> Why am I asking it?
>
> What will it tell me?
>
> What will I do with this information?

- Arrange the questions.

  A survey, especially if it is to be a personal interview, should flow like a conversation.

  Questions should be in a logical order, each leading into the next.

  Begin with questions that the respondent can answer easily, that are not threatening, and that cannot have a wrong answer.

  Hold personal questions till near the end, when rapport has been developed and trust established.

- Construct the survey form.

  Make instructions clear for the respondent and/or interviewer.

  Place the questions on the page so that the answers can be easily seen when reading back over the form. This can be done by placing answers down the right-hand margin.

  You can use either open-ended or closed questions. Open-ended questions let the respondent reply as he or she wishes, and are good as exploratory devices. Closed questions fit the reply into fixed categories, and are easier to analyse.

- Test the survey.

  Testing assures that people read the questions the same way you meant them to be read, so you get the information you need.

  If possible, test the survey on a group just like the ones you will be examining, but not the same people.

- Revise the survey.

  We might think that it's the respondents who misunderstand our questions, but it's what they think the question asks that matters.

  So ask the questions the way they have to be asked to get the information you need.

  Keep the questions short, and avoid double-barrelled questions that ask two things.

- Decide who shall be surveyed.

  First determine the entire population group you wish to find out about.

  Ideally, you would survey everyone in this group. But this is often too big a job.

  Therefore, you can choose a sample which represents the group. The larger the sample the better. But if there is a large population, as small a sample as 10% of the population can be a reliable indicator.

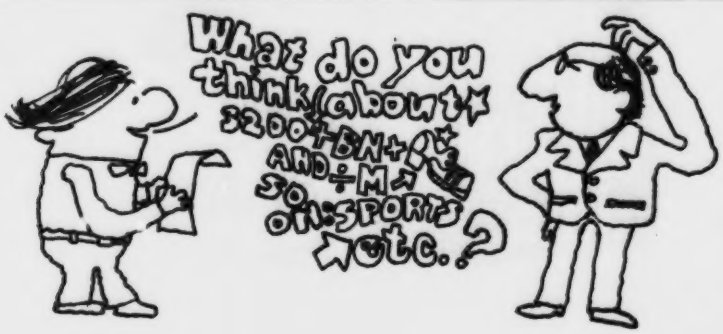
  Sampling a population can be tricky, if the results are not going to be biased. There are many methods, but this one has often proved convenient.

Get a list of the entire population, for example, voters' list, membership list, registration list.

Decide what proportion of the population you desire.

Choose every nth member of the population, depending on what proportion you have decided upon (e.g. 10% — choose every 10th; 25% — choose every 4th).

Choose the first name at random. For example, if you are to choose every 10th name, start randomly, perhaps by marking 10 pieces of paper 1 to 10, and picking one blindly.



- Train the surveyors.

  All surveyors must present the survey in the same manner. It is very easy for a surveyor to bias answers by the manner and tone used in asking the questions.

  Strive for uniformity in the methods of recording answers if personal interviews are conducted.

  Make sure instructions are detailed, yet simple if form is left for respondent to complete.

- Conduct the survey.

  Be persistent about getting replies from all those in your sample. It is easy to miss people in such a way that the results are biased. For example, evening interviews might miss shift workers who have particular recreational needs.

  Timing of a survey is important. Consider: day time or evening? Week day or week-end? Summer or winter? A combination is usually best, so that no one will unintentionally be left out.

  If you are going to survey the entire population, or a good portion of it, why not use block representatives as surveyors? They know local residents and can likely get a higher return rate.

  Using block representatives can also be the start of an ongoing system of communication from the population to the recreation planner and back again — a path to the community.

A Few Final Notes on This Process

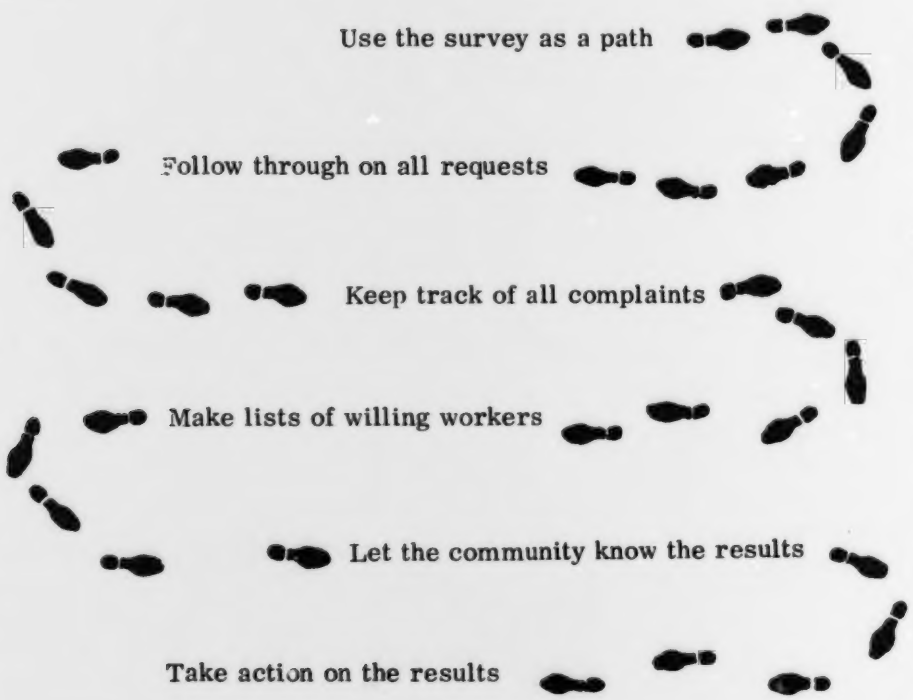
Surveys should not be rushed. Take time on the early steps. Care spent there will save time and trouble later.

Surveys are not difficult. They require careful attention, not some mysterious intelligence.

Community colleges are a good source of assistance in conducting surveys, both in preparation and in implementation. Besides, that's why community colleges are there.

An even better source of assistance is the community itself. Use it to help gather the information.

A surveyor orientation session can be helpful. It allows for instructions to be standardized, and boosts enthusiasm. A surveyor's handbook can help too!


Use the survey as a path
Follow through on all requests
Keep track of all complaints
Make lists of willing workers
Let the community know the results
Take action on the results

Setting Objectives

Of all the steps in developing the survey, setting objectives causes the most difficulty. Therefore, let's look at this step before we examine the questions themselves.

Objectives can be general or specific. Each type is needed. You start with the general and work to the specific. When completed, each specific objective will yield one question for the survey. For example:

General Objective

To determine recreation needs in our community

Increasingly Specific Objectives

To determine needs for cultural activities

Each level produces numerous objectives leading to next level. This is just one sequence.

To determine needs for cultural activities for children

To determine needs for pottery classes for children

SURVEY QUESTION

Do you think your children would participate in pottery classes if they were available?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know ☐

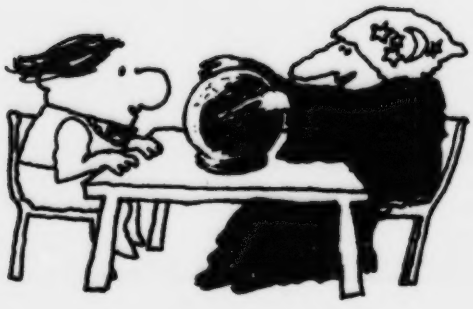
The aim here is to make objectives operational. Each objective, to be fulfilled, must be in detailed, concrete form.

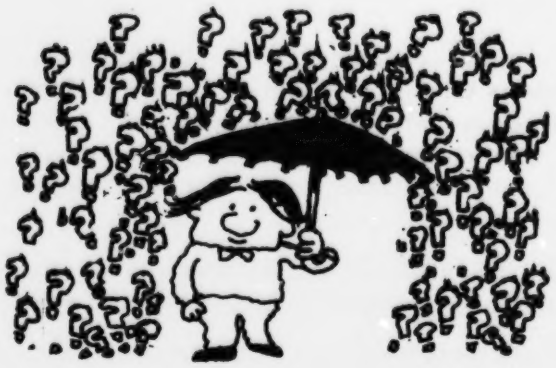
Where do objectives come from? From the community, from what you think is necessary and from what the residents think is necessary. Gather residents together early in the planning stages and see what their concerns are. Each person or group can identify the information they desire. This will produce a more valuable survey and one more easily conducted because of their support and involvement.

Be clear in setting objectives whether it is attitudes or activities you are after. Each tells you a different thing. Here is an example of the two types of objectives:

> To discover what activities people think a recreation department should sponsor
>
> or
>
> To discover what activities people will participate in.

Objective setting is a continual why process. At each stage, ask why the objective is important. This process will help you become more specific with your objectives, and will assure they are always geared to the community at hand.





Questions Galore

A. The General Stuff

All surveys have some types of questions in common. They provide background information on the people surveyed and are useful in examining the other questions asked. These are called facesheet questions, and usually appear near the end of the survey form. Here are some typical examples.

Note format of questions with answer boxes on the right.

Response categories depend on use you will make of the data.

Now, just before we finish, here are a few questions which we need answered to sort out all the other information you have given us earlier. Remember, all your answers are anonymous.

Sex?	male	☐
	female	☐
In what age group do you fall as of your last birthday?	18-25	☐
	26-35	☐
	36-45	☐
	46-65	☐
	over 65	☐
Are you?	single	☐
	married	☐
	separated	☐
	divorced	☐
	widowed	☐
Have you children?	no children	☐
	1	☐
	2	☐
	3	☐
	4 or more	☐
Are you presently employed?	full-time yes	☐
	no	☐
	part-time yes	☐
	no	☐

In what occupation group would you class yourself?

professional and technical
managers, officials and proprietors
craftspeople, foremen/women (skilled)
operatives (semi-skilled)
laborers
clerical, sales
farmers
private household service
other

What was your total family income last year from all sources?

under $5000
$5000 - $10,000
$10,000 - $20,000
$20,000 - $30,000
over $30,000

In what type of building is your home located?

single family house
semi-detached house
town house
row housing
flat in a house
low-rise (under 10 floors)
high-rise (10 floors or more)
other

Categories vary with your purpose in asking the question.

Many other questions are common, relating to such topics as nationality, religion, and education. Also, surveys often ask for information not only about the respondent, but about the head of the household, if that person is other than respondent, or the respondent's children.

ASIDE: Give respondents an opportunity to mark down their names if they wish but make it clear they don't have to. Anonymity is essential to get a good rate of returns!

B. Types of Questions

The main part of your survey will be composed of questions related to your main objective. Three main types of questions are common:

Activity and participation questions

Interest and preference questions

Attitude and opinion questions

Some surveys contain only one type of question; most contain questions of all three types. Before listing some typical questions of each type, let's emphasize two points:

Don't use someone else's questions. Construct ones that are custom-made for your community and your objectives.

Ask general questions before specific ones. Ask all questions on one topic in one section. Don't ask long, involved questions.

All the sample questions which follow refer to recreation activities. Each of the question types can just as suitably be directed towards parks and open spaces, facilities, adult education, or any other people topics.

Activity and Participation Questions

These questions are designed to find out what people are currently doing as recreation. Present activities can be the best indication of future desires.

One common form of question is:

You provide the list relevant to your community

How often do you participate in each of the following activities. Please check the correct column.

	Several times Weekly	Weekly	Monthly or less
Golf			
Swimming			
Hiking			
Boating			

These frequencies are arbitrary. Choose ones that suit your purpose!

It is common to ask this question regarding other members of the respondent's family also.

Other questions could follow this one which would provide additional information. For example:

What activities do you participate in most often? Please list below.

Where do you usually participate in these activities?

- at home
- in the neighborhood
- in the town (city)
- outside the town

Do you participate in any recreation activity sponsored by the Recreation Department?

- yes
- no
- don't know

Do you participate in any recreation activity sponsored by some other agency?

- yes
- no
- don't know

If yes, what activity?
Who sponsors it?
How do you usually get to your favorite activities?

- walk
- private car
- public transportation

What time of day are these activities usually held?

- morning
- afternoon
- evening

What time of the week?

- weekdays
- weekends

As you can see, these questions all refer to present participation. Several, particularly the last few, could be asked as preference questions, and indeed such questions can also be included.

However, let's emphasize that present actions are a more reliable forecast of future actions than verbal or written intentions.

Interest and Preference Questions

These questions are designed to discover what types of activities a population would most like to participate in. They involve asking people what they would like to do rather than what they are doing.

Here are some typical questions of this type:

Which of the following activities do you most prefer? (Check as many as you wish)

- collecting things ☐
- exploring and learning ☐
- social activities ☐
- taking part in sports ☐
- watching sports ☐
- no preferences ☐

Would you participate in the following activities if the opportunity were offered? Check those you would participate in.

- ceramics ☐
- keep-fit ☐
- macramé ☐
- volleyball ☐
- other (please specify) ☐

In what activities would you like your children to participate?

- music lessons ☐
- hockey ☐
- arts and crafts ☐
- ballet ☐
- tap dancing ☐
- drama ☐
- other (please specify) ☐

Open-ended questions can often get at preferences that closed questions might overlook. For example

What recreation activities would you participate in, if available?

_____

What activities do you think would be popular in this community?

_____

How much do you think recreation activities should cost?

_____

Careful! Be sure you know what these questions are telling you. "I like smoogering" does not mean "I will participate in a smoogering program if you set one up".

Attitudes and Opinion Questions

These questions aim at discovering what the community thinks about recreation and the activities that now exist. It is important when using opinion questions to discover not only what people think, but why they think that way.

Here again are some typical questions:

Are you satisfied with the recreation opportunities in this community?

very satisfied
somewhat satisfied
somewhat dissatisfied
very dissatisfied
no opinion

Why do you feel this way? _____

Is the information about recreation activities:

very adequate
adequate
inadequate
very inadequate
no opinion

Why do you think so? _____

Do you prefer:

courses
supervised activities
informal participation
no opinion

Notice that in closed questions everyone must find some answer he or she can check. Therefore such responses as "no opinion" or "no preference" must always be included where appropriate.

Open-ended questions are also valuable in discovering opinion. Here are two samples:

What do you think is the single most important recreational need in this community?

_____

How do you feel the overall recreation opportunities in this community could be improved?

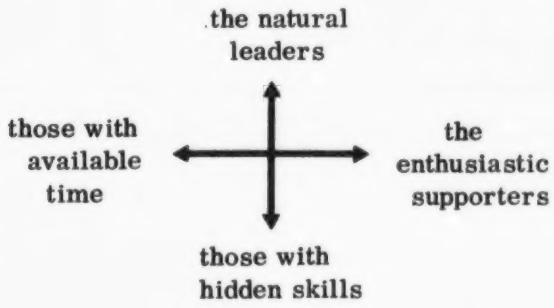
_____

One Step Beyond

Surveys to this point have been presented chiefly as a means of gathering information. Why not take them one step further?

1. The Resource Survey

Use the survey to locate those special people in your community.



The aim here is to locate the hidden skills and talents, get a commitment to be of assistance, and follow-up on this commitment!

2. The Awareness Survey

Questions make people think and get them involved. Therefore, ask questions designed to create the awareness you desire.

CAPITALIZE ON THIS AWARENESS!

Act now!! Don't wait three months to analyze and study the results. Get back to your respondents immediately, when their awareness and interest are highest.

3. The Advocacy Survey

WARNING: This concoction, if improperly administered, can be dangerous to your health!

Surveys are supposed to be unbiased. An unknown bias can be disastrous to your results. However, an intentional bias can be used to good effect, if you know what you are doing!

For example, if you are helping a cultural group construct a survey form and they feel sports groups are receiving too much attention, the questions could be asked:

> Do you think it is fair that sports groups receive greater financial support from the municipality than cultural groups?
>
> yes ☐
> no ☐
>
> Are you aware that sports groups receive three times as much taxpayer money as cultural groups?
>
> yes ☐
> no ☐

These questions advocate. They take a definite point of view, and lead the respondent to a certain answer, or to a new awareness.

The advocacy survey can be used positively or negatively. You should be aware of its power, but be careful how you use it!

Two final points on the advocacy survey:

It's purpose is to affect the respondent, not collect unbiased information.

It should be used as one element in a larger campaign for a particular cause, involving also press stories, public talks and any other means of reaching the public.

In going one step beyond, use any of the three methods suggested. Just remember:

A survey brings you in touch with hundreds, maybe thousands of people. You can use this opportunity to turn them on to what you are trying to do.

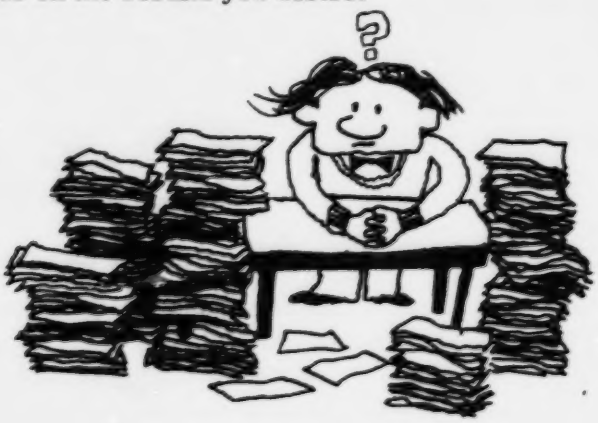
Don't flub the chance!

Where to From Here?

The main task of this booklet has been completed: to present, simply, the whys and hows of collecting information about a community. But one question remains: "After I've got all this information, what do I do with it?"

The answer involves what is traditionally called the analysis and presentation stage of research. Although analysis and presentation can be taken as separate subjects, for our purposes they can be treated as one. Here are a few points to bear in mind:

- What you do with the information you have collected depends on your objectives. You should have decided on this procedure before you began the information collection.
- Analysis and presentation doesn't mean elaborate statistics. Often just reporting total numbers and percentages will be sufficient.
- Organization is the key factor to your analysis and presentation. Order the information in a way that seems to follow a natural course, with all the information on one topic examined at one time.
- Always keep your audience in mind. Will the information and your conclusion be presented to a recreation committee? A recreation staff? A municipal council? The public at large? A funding body? The approach you take depends on the results you desire.



Reports have two basic components: written material and graphic illustrations.

Written material first:

- Be brief. Keep your written descriptions to a minimum.
- But certain components are essential:
  - objective(s) of the survey
  - methods
  - reception by the community
  - analysis
  - conclusions
  - where to from here — i.e. what actions will result from the survey?
- Appearance is important. Make your written sections crisp. Make them stand out. Make them neat.
- A short summary is best for wide distribution. If a detailed report is written, make it available to all but don't push it onto people.
- Use language familiar to the reader. Technical words and professional jargon do more harm than good.

Graphic illustrations bring a report to life and are more easily grasped than long explanations. Many graphic procedures are available. Always try to use the one most appropriate for the information you are presenting. Here are a few:

1. Tables—by far the most common device.

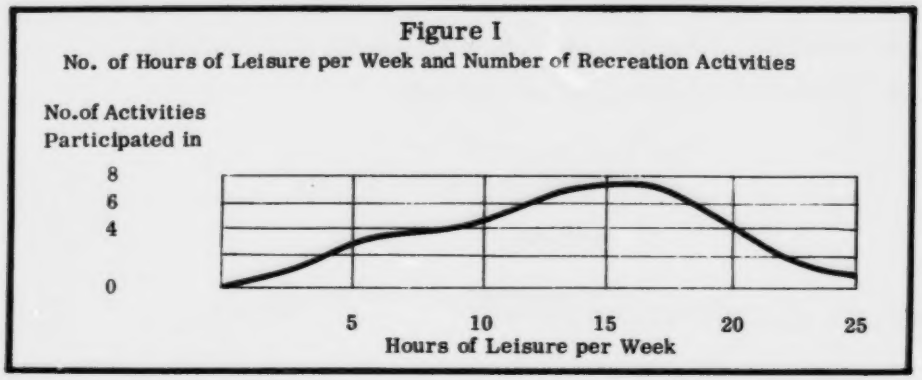
Table 1 — Age of Respondents and Types of Recreation Preferred

Age	Recreation Types			
	Physical	Cultural	Social	Total
18-30				
31-65				
over 65				
Total				

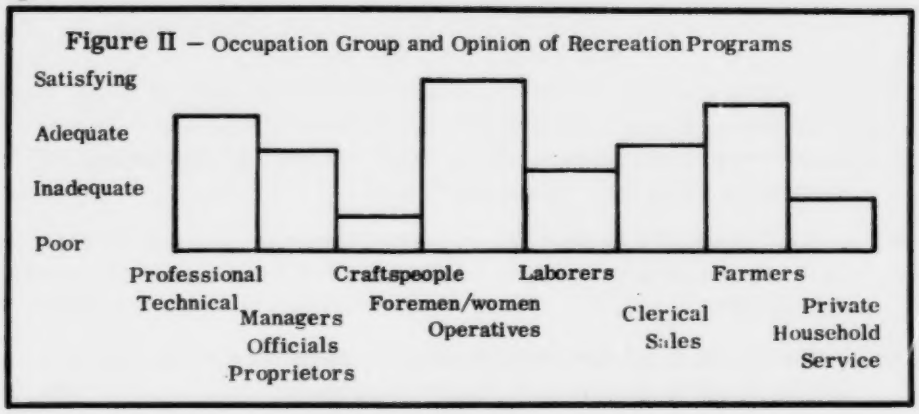
Always be sure to title tables or figures. The categories come from your questions.

2. Graphs — many types are available.

a. Line Graph



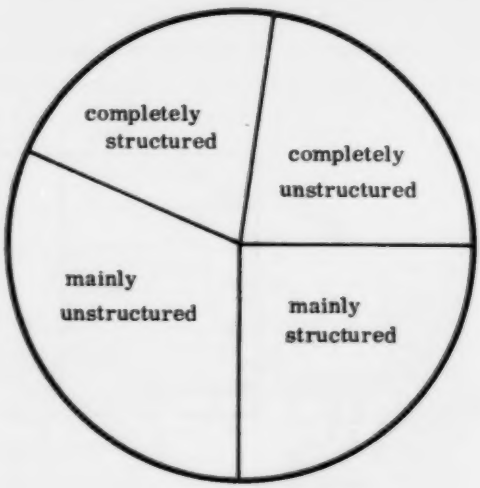
b. Bar Graph



Note: Always explain how information was gathered, if this is not evident. A good idea, instead of a lot of lengthy footnotes, is to attach a survey form to the report and refer to the appropriate question.

3. Pie Charts

Figure III
Types of Recreation Activity Respondents Prefer for Their Children

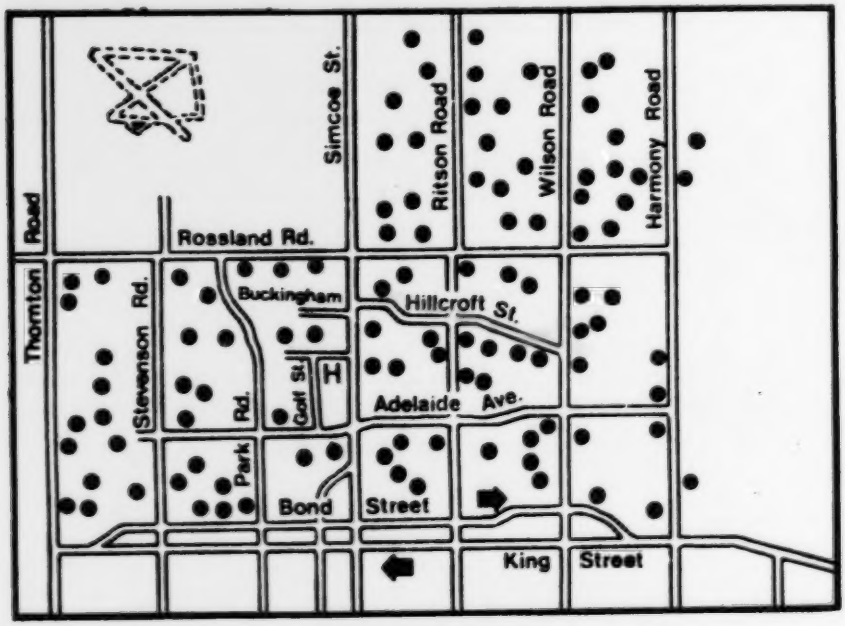


4. Comparative Representation.

Figure IV Comparison of Popularity of Various Physical Activities

5. Maps— can be put to many uses.

Figure V. Our Community, Showing Distribution of Participants in Recreation Department Programs. Each Dot Represents One Participant



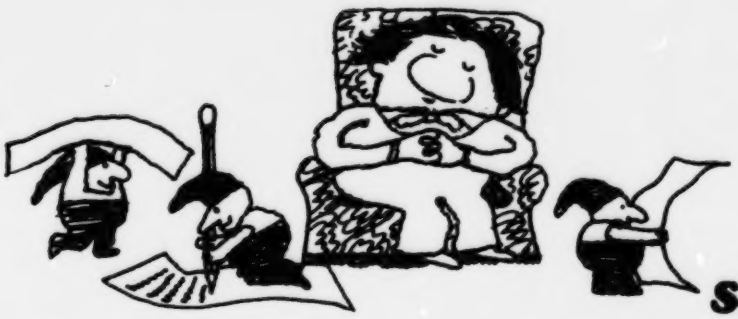
This list could go on and on — flow charts, diagrams of apparatus, photographs. These and many more methods have been used to transfer relationships to the reader. Many of the most effective methods were created to suit the occasion.

Remember that these examples are just illustrations. Use methods that add to your presentation. Figures should not be used for simple concepts, but should be used when they can snap a significant relationship into sharp focus that is otherwise difficult to grasp.

One final word:

The more the community is involved in the survey, the less you will need to sell the results.

> . . . and thus the moral of this booklet. Your "Path to the Community" may be difficult to blaze, but after you've travelled it once, the next trip is easier. And the more often this path is travelled, the more clearly defined and useful it becomes.



Some Extra Help

Long lists of references none of us will ever get time to look at are of little value. Instead, here are just a few books that can help if you've got special questions or problems.

Each of these books has its own strengths, but each would be valuable if you want a general overview of survey research.

Backstrom, C. H. and Hurst, G. D. — Survey Research, (Northwestern University Press — 1963)
A general, all inclusive textbook, but especially clear and helpful regarding sampling and question writing.

Moser, C. A. — Survey Methods in Social Investigation, (New York, The MacMillan Co., 1958)
Another overall look at survey research with a strong section on presentation and survey reports.

Goode, William J. and Hatt, Paul K. — Methods in Social Research, (New York, McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1952)
This overall survey of research methods is most useful in its discussion of how to collect the information.

Blalock, H. M. — Social Statistics, (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1960)
If you wish to enter the area of statistics in your analysis, this book states clearly when you can use different statistical techniques and how you use them.

One additional suggestion.

People are usually more helpful than books. If you are near a university or community college, get hold of their specialist in survey research. Also, contact your Sports and Recreation Division consultant — resources are available to assist you.

Ontario

Ministry of Culture and Recreation

Recreation Branch

Hon. Reuben C. Baetz
Minister
Ward Cornell
Deputy Minister

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